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04/16/24 BIG TECH

Fentanyl Fear Factor: White House Leverages Drug Scare to Push for Controversial Surveillance Powers + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff



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Fentanyl Fear Factor: White House Leverages Drug Scare to Push for Controversial Surveillance Powers

Reclaim the Net reported:

In a recent public appeal, the Biden administration has urged the reauthorization of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) before it expires on April 19. Bill Burns, the CIA Director, issued a statement, alleging the significant role of the FISA powers in fighting threats against national security, especially the illicit trafficking of fentanyl into the United States.

Burns highlighted the gravity of the fentanyl threat, saying, "The threat to the U.S. posed by fentanyl and other synthetic opioids is real. Section 702 is an essential tool in the CIA's mission to protect the American people from a range of threats, including illicit fentanyl trafficking. Without this vital program, the CIA simply would not be able to defend our country as effectively in as many dangerous corners of the world."

This tactic of using big, scary problems to justify sweeping surveillance powers is quite common in debates about national security. While it's understandable to want strong measures to combat real threats, this approach raises big red flags about personal privacy and government overreach.

Clearly, not needing a warrant to snoop on people's communications could easily be abused. Without these safeguards, there's too much room for the government to overstep. Plus, by framing the surveillance as essential for stopping things like drug trafficking, the government sort of makes these issues the scapegoats. This simplifies complex issues and makes it seem okay to sacrifice our privacy for security.

Zuckerberg Isn't on the Hook for Kids' Instagram Addiction, a Judge Just Ruled

Insider reported:

A judge has granted Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg's motion to dismiss 25 cases that alleged he was personally responsible for Instagram and Facebook fuelling social media addiction.

U.S. district judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers's ruling on Monday excused Zuckerberg from being held personally liable while the case against Meta still stands.

The cases filed sought to hold Zuckerberg personally responsible for keeping children hooked on Meta products. They alleged that the Meta CEO has control over design decisions that targeted higher user engagement and accused him of ignoring warnings that his platforms were unsafe for kids.

The judge said that Zuckerberg couldn't be held liable just because he has a public-facing role at Meta. The ruling aligns with the legal approach that sees executives typically shielded from personal liability.

Illinois Woman Hits Target With Class Action Lawsuit for Collecting Biometric Data Without Her Consent

FOXBusiness reported:

An Illinois woman filed a class action lawsuit against Target, accusing the retail giant of collecting and storing her biometric data, including face and fingerprint scans, without her consent in violation of state law.

Annetta Dean, who filed the lawsuit with the intention of preventing Target from further violating the privacy rights of state residents, is also pursuing statutory damages for the company's alleged collection, storage and use of customers' biometric data, according to the lawsuit obtained by FOX 32 Chicago.

The lawsuit, filed last month in Cook County, claims Target's surveillance systems, including cameras with facial recognition technology installed in Illinois stores, "surreptitiously" collect biometric data on customers without their knowledge or consent.

Novavax Availability Dooms Christian Workers' COVID Vaccine Suit

Bloomberg Law reported:

Two Christian healthcare workers in Virginia lost their claims that Inova Health Systems' denial of their requests for exemption from its COVID-19 vaccination mandate violated federal religious bias law.

The plaintiffs had refused to be injected with vaccines developed or tested by using human fetal-derived cell lines. But they were unable to establish that Novavax, a vaccine authorized by the U.S. for emergency use before their exemption requests were denied, was derived from those processes.

A jury, therefore, couldn't find the workers' religious objections to being vaccinated against COVID conflicted with their employer's COVID vaccination requirement.

The U.S. Isn't Just Reauthorizing Its Surveillance Laws — It's Vastly Expanding Them

The Guardian reported:

The U.S. House of Representatives agreed to reauthorize a controversial spying law known as Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act last Friday without any meaningful reforms, dashing hopes that Congress might finally put a stop to intelligence agencies' warrantless surveillance of Americans' emails, text messages and phone calls.

The vote not only reauthorized the act, though; it also vastly expanded the surveillance law enforcement can conduct. In a move that Senator Ron Wyden condemned as "terrifying," the House also doubled down on a surveillance authority that has been used against American protesters, journalists and political donors in a chilling assault on free speech.

Section 702 in its current form allows the government to compel communications giants like Google and Verizon to turn over information. An amendment to the bill approved by the House vastly increases the law's scope. The Turner-Himes amendment — so named for its champions Representatives Mike Turner and Jim Himes — would permit federal law enforcement to also force "any other service provider" with access to communications equipment to hand over data. That means anyone with access to a wifi router, server or even phone — anyone from a landlord to a laundromat — could be required to help the government spy.

The Senate is expected to vote on the House bill as soon as this week, and if it passes there, Joe Biden is likely to sign it. All Americans should be terrified by that prospect.

Biden Administration Announces New Partnership With 50 Countries to Stifle Future Pandemics

Associated Press reported:

President Joe Biden's administration will help 50 countries identify and respond to infectious diseases, with the goal of preventing pandemics like the COVID-19 outbreak that suddenly halted normal life around the globe in 2020.

U.S. government officials will offer support in the countries, most of them located in Africa and Asia, to develop better testing, surveillance, communication and preparedness for such outbreaks in those countries.

The announcement about the strategy comes as countries have struggled to meet a worldwide accord on responses to future pandemics. Four years after the coronavirus pandemic, the prospects of a pandemic treaty signed by all 194 of the World Health Organization's members are flailing.

The Biden administration plans to move forward with its new strategy to prepare the world for the next pandemic, regardless of whether a treaty is hammered out or not, a senior administration official told reporters on Monday.

Major Psychology Group Says Infinite Scrolling, Other Social Media Features Are 'Particularly Risky' to Youth Mental Health

NBC News reported:

A top psychology group is urging technology companies and legislators to take greater steps to protect adolescents' mental health, arguing that social media platforms are built for adults and are "not inherently suitable for youth."

Social media features such as endless scrolling and push notifications are "particularly risky" to young people, whose developing brains are less able to disengage from addictive experiences and are more sensitive to distractions, the American Psychological Association wrote in a report released Tuesday.

But age restrictions on social media platforms alone don't fully address the dangers, especially since many kids easily find workarounds to such limits. Instead, social media companies need to make fundamental design changes, the group said in its report.

Hackers Start Leaking Stolen Change Healthcare Data

Axios reported:

The RansomHub hacking group is starting to share snippets of the data stolen from Change Healthcare's networks during a recent attack.

Why it matters: Initial screenshots published Monday and seen by Axios suggest that hackers have stolen a trove of sensitive information, including patients' hospital bills, financial documents and company contracts.

There's currently a countdown on RansomHub's dark-web leak site threatening to publish the data on Friday.

Last month, Wired reported that the company appeared to have paid the BlackCat ransomware group a hefty \$22 million to prevent a data leak and unlock its systems.

Chatbots' Flaws Aren't Stopping Tech Giants From Putting Them Everywhere

The Washington Post reported:

The risk of chatbots going awry doesn't seem to be slowing tech giants' march to integrate them into the world's largest online platforms.

Meta has recently begun rolling out its Meta AI chatbot more broadly, including in WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger across India and parts of Africa, bringing the tool to markets where it serves hundreds of millions of people. And on Monday, the New York Times reported that the company is approaching Instagram influencers in the United States on a project called "Creator AI" that would let an AI avatar trained on their voice interact with their fans on their behalf.

For a company that has prided itself on AI research but fallen behind rivals Microsoft, Google and OpenAI on commercialization of the latest language and image models, the moves represent an ambitious leap toward integrating AI into people's everyday interactions. Meta envisions people asking its chatbots questions, using it to create images or just chatting with it, the company said when it announced Meta AI in September.

AI chatbots can dazzle with their ability to converse on a wide range of topics and generate images of whatever people dream up (with some limits). But what the industry calls "hallucinations" — responses that aren't grounded in reality — have come to seem more like a feature than a bug. Lately, companies including Microsoft, Google, OpenAI and now Meta have tried to patch the problem by connecting AI models to the web and letting them search for information and cite their sources, with mixed results.

Meanwhile, attempts to train chatbots to shed offensive biases picked up from their training data often fall short or go too far.

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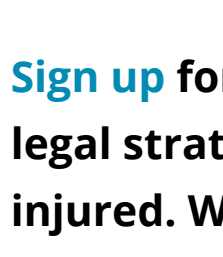
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Leslie Taylor

20 hours ago

"Fentanyl Fear Factor: White House Leverages Drug Scare to Push for Controversial Surveillance Powers" WEF guru stated a couple of years ago, "Now surveillance is going on under the skin. Governments want to know what is going on inside our bodies." "Humans are now hackable animals." I wouldn't trust many of our world leaders to baby sit let alone hack, track and control all of humanity.

1 0 Reply



ME MCC

21 hours ago

And people will allow it...

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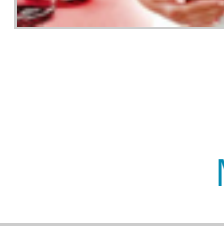
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